

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in this application.

1 – 8. (canceled)

9. (currently amended) An awl apparatus for penetrating bone, comprising:

a shaft having a proximal end and a distal end, with a cutting edge formed on the distal end;

an outer sleeve having a wall, a proximal end, and a distal end, wherein the outer sleeve surrounds at least a portion of the shaft and is movable with respect to the shaft, the outer sleeve including a plurality of openings to facilitate cleaning and sterilization of the awl;

an inner sleeve having a proximal end and a distal end, wherein at least a portion of the inner sleeve is located in between the shaft and the outer sleeve; and

a biasing member configured to bias the shaft to an initial position within the outer sleeve, wherein the biasing member surrounds at least a portion of the shaft and is located in between the outer sleeve and the distal end of the inner sleeve;

wherein the shaft is movable in the axial direction with respect to the outer sleeve by a predetermined distance to limit the depth of penetration of the cutting tip into a bone; and

wherein the shaft can be rotated within the outer sleeve to aid in penetrating a bone.

10. (currently amended) The awl apparatus of claim 9, wherein the biasing elastic member is a coil spring.

11. (currently amended) The awl apparatus of claim 9, wherein the biasing elastic member is a coil spring surrounding the shaft.

12. (previously presented) The awl apparatus of claim 9, wherein the distal end of the outer sleeve has external threads for releasable attachment to a bone plate.

13. (previously presented) The awl apparatus of claim 9, wherein the initial position of the shaft is such that the cutting edge of the shaft is surrounded by the outer sleeve.

14. (previously presented) The awl apparatus of claim 9, wherein the distal end of the outer sleeve is conically tapered for releasable attachment to a bone plate.

15. (previously presented) The awl apparatus of claim 9, further comprising a shoulder for limiting depth of penetration into the bone by the cutting edge.

16. (previously presented) The awl apparatus of claim 9, further comprising a handle attached to the end of the shaft.

17-20. (canceled)

21. (currently amended) An awl assembly comprising:

a top outer sleeve having a distal end, a proximal end, and a throughbore extending from said distal end to said proximal end, wherein the top outer sleeve includes a plurality of openings to facilitate cleaning and sterilization of the awl;

a bottom outer sleeve having a distal end, a proximal end, and a throughbore extending from said distal end to said proximal end, wherein said proximal end of said bottom outer sleeve is sized and configured to releasably engage said top outer sleeve, wherein the bottom outer sleeve includes a plurality of openings to facilitate cleaning and sterilization of the awl;

an inner sleeve having a distal end, a proximal end, and a throughbore extending from said distal end to said proximal end, wherein said inner sleeve is sized and configured to be at least partially received within the throughbore of the top outer sleeve;

an awl shaft having a cutting tip formed on a distal end thereof, wherein said awl shaft is sized and configured to be slideably disposed within the throughbore of the inner sleeve, the throughbore of the top outer sleeve and the throughbore of the bottom outer sleeve; and

a spring element, the spring element providing a biasing force for maintaining the cutting tip within the bottom outer sleeve, wherein the spring element surrounds at least a portion of the shaft and is located in between the top outer sleeve and the distal end of the inner sleeve;

wherein the distal end of the bottom outer sleeve is sized and configured to releasably engage an anchor hole of a bone plate.

22. (canceled)

23. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 22, wherein the throughbore of the top outer sleeve includes a shoulder formed therein, the spring element being located in between the shoulder and the distal end of the inner sleeve.

24. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 21, wherein the proximal end of the awl shaft includes a hand grip connected thereto.

25. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 21, wherein the distal end of the top outer sleeve is disposed within the proximal end of the bottom outer sleeve.

26. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 21, wherein said distal end of said top outer sleeve is threaded for threadedly engaging the bottom outer sleeve.

27 - 28. (canceled)

29. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 21, wherein the distal end of the bottom outer sleeve is externally threaded for threadedly engaging internal threads formed in the anchor hole of the bone plate.

30. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 21, wherein the inner sleeve is mechanically joined to the proximal end of the awl shaft.

31. (previously presented) The awl assembly of claim 21, wherein the awl shaft is free to rotate within the top outer sleeve and the bottom outer sleeve.